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THE
DUTIES OF MASTERS AND SLAVES
RESPECTIVELY :

OR

DOMESTIC SERVITUDE AS SANCTIONED BY THE BIBLE :

A DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED

IN THE GOVERNMENT-STREET CHURCH, MOBILE, ALA ,

BY REV. W. T. HAMILTON, D. D.,
Pastor of said Church,

ON SUNDAY NIGHT, DECEMBER 15, 1844.

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THE DUTIES OF MASTERS AND SLAVES.

COLoss. 4: 1. "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven." Compare Ephes. 6: 9.

FULLY aware though I am, that the subject I have proposed for discussion to-night is one of no ordinary delicacy, and of no little difficulty, on many accounts, yet its importance is such, that I think it ought to be discussed fully and without reserve. Nor can the discussion, if discreetly conducted, fail to be beneficial to all parties. It is not to be disguised, that the existence of domestic servitude among us attracts a large share of attention from the citizens of other States where it is no longer found. This subject is agitating the country from one extremity to the other. In the non-slaveholding States, it has produced a great excitement among all classes. It has already given birth to a political party, which is daily increasing in strength and influence,—and whose spirit is such as to show that they will never rest, and will leave no stone unturned, until, for the accomplishment of their purpose, they have convulsed the whole country. A like spirit has invaded the church, and has already produced, in more than one ecclesiastical body, stormy discussion and stringent measures, which threaten disruption to the church, and bitter animosity in its dissevered fragments, instead of harmony and love. The great body of the Methodist persuasion has been shaken to its centre by this perplexing subject. Nor has our own beloved church escaped without agitation, and imminent hazard of a second great schism, on this ground. Nor let us deceive ourselves by the idea that all this is the work of a few, a very few rash, ill-informed, and pestilent agitators. It is a very easy thing to class them all together as *hot-headed abolitionists* and *crazy fanatics*; but to do so is not wise: the averment is not true. I admit that there is a very active, determined, and persevering set of men, the thorough-blooded abolitionists, who go all lengths in denunciation against the whole South, and against every man who lives here; and who seem prepared to attempt the extirpation of servitude among us, regardless of consequences. I

grant too that these, the prime movers in all the measures of the party, whether political or religious, are *few in number*. These *ultra abolitionists are few*, but they are resolute and reckless.

With some of this class it was my lot, during my late tour at the North and East, to come in contact; and my deliberate opinion is, that they are crazy *quoad hoc*. They are *monomaniacs*; labouring, on one subject, under a delusion which renders their minds impervious to reason. In my intercourse with them, (for, to avoid them was not always possible,) I have been saluted by epithets neither flattering nor courteous. They have, publicly and privately, through the newspapers and by private letters, denounced me as *a thief, a ruffian, a villain, a hypocritical oppressor of the defenceless*; as *one who approaches the very altar of God, to solemnize the deepest mysteries of religion, with hands stained and REEKING WITH THE BLOOD of the victims of a cruel oppression*. And why? because, and simply because, I live in a slaveholding community; I minister to a church most of whose members hold slaves;—and instead of teaching my flock that in so doing they are guilty of grievous sin and must be all damned for ever unless they, at once, set all their slaves free, I am supposed to be myself a slaveholder, and as such, a partner and abettor of their crime. Well! at all this, bad as it is, we might calmly smile, were this the extent of the evil. But these rabid advocates of universal equality and of immediate emancipation are but a very insignificant portion of that great body of American citizens, who look upon slavery with disapprobation and abhorrence. There are thousands of thousands in our country, utterly opposed to the violent spirit of Garrison and his followers, who yet look upon this institution as evil, altogether evil,—based on wrong, and most injurious in its tendency;—who contend that it must be extirpated sooner or later, and that it ought to be removed at the earliest possible moment that shall be found compatible with safety. And among these, there are certainly some of the clearest and coolest heads, as well as of the purest hearts, that this country can boast.

Grave and learned divines, intelligent lay officers of the church, nay, dignified ecclesiastical bodies, have, by the passage of solemn resolutions entered on their permanent records, pronounced slaveholding to be a deadly sin, inconsistent with all pretensions to piety; whereupon, they expressly debar from their pulpits all slaveholding ministers, and all pastors of slaveholding churches; and they shut out from the communion-table, and from the church of God, any and every slaveholder. These men may be mistaken; but they are, beyond all question, sincere and deeply in earnest. Again and again, I myself have been shut out

from pulpits, which my warm personal friends were desirous I should occupy. I have been refused subscriptions to our Bethel church, because it was to be erected in a slave-holding city: and, on one occasion, after having, on the Sabbath, by invitation from the pastor, preached in a certain church, and assisted at the communion-table, I was, a few days afterwards, *insulted*, by the thrusting into my hands of a set of resolutions, (duly attested as having been passed at a church meeting,) expressive of their abhorrence of slavery and of slaveholders, and expressive also of their conviction that deep repentance and humiliation of spirit before God were required of them, for the *great sin* of having recognized a slave-holder as a Christian and a minister, and attended on the dispensation of the word and ordinances at his hands. These resolutions I still have in my possession.

All these several considerations combine to place this matter in a very serious light. If these men are right, then we are wrong; and if so, then the southern portion of the church is guilty of a great sin, and her ministers are guilty of a still greater sin, in that they not only forbear to denounce the institution as sinful, and forbear to call upon their hearers to repent of it, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, by setting all their slaves free at once, but in that they also participate in the guilt of it, as well as connive at it; since ministers, no less than others, employ slaves as servants; and whether those slaves be their own property or merely hired, whether obtained by inheritance or purchase, matters not, as to the principle involved. If to hold slaves be a sin, ministers of the gospel ought to know it; and knowing it, they ought to teach it, no matter what might be the legal penalties, or the personal hazard, of so doing. Your laws can never render murder, adultery, theft, or Sabbath-breaking right, because God's word forbids these crimes; and God's authority is paramount. Before Heaven's decisions mere human law must bow. If, then, God's holy word condemns slavery, the minister of God is bound to condemn it, and to call on his hearers to clear themselves of all participation in it, whatever be the risk attendant on so doing; for what God condemns, human law can never make right.

If, on the contrary, God's holy book does not condemn domestic servitude; if, so far from this, it does distinctly recognize the institution, and lay down directions for the conduct of Christians in both or in either of the relations, as masters or as servants, *then the institution is not, in itself and necessarily, sinful*, whatever may be the evils individually connected with it, or springing from it. If so, then a man may be a servant, or he may be the owner of many servants, and still be a

true Christian, a worthy communicant in the church of God; nay, he may be a faithful and useful minister of the gospel. If so, then the ground assumed by so many Christians and ecclesiastical bodies at the North and the West, in excluding us from their pulpits and from their communion, simply on this one ground, is untenable, and ought to be abandoned. The men who take such ground may be in error, and we, who sincerely believe them to be so, may deplore their error, yet we cannot but respect their consistency and their zeal. Our part should be, to exhibit equal firmness, with a gentler spirit; by no means returning railing for railing, but contrariwise, forbearance and magnanimity.

But, inasmuch as it is undeniable that by these men our ecclesiastical standing, our piety, our sincerity, our very honesty as men, are all called into question, I have thought it but right to request your attention to a public discussion of this subject, which I shall aim to present in the light furnished by the Bible, and with all the plainness which the vast importance of the subject, and the weighty duties this relation imposes upon masters, seem to demand.

I take the ground distinctly and emphatically, that *domestic servitude as found among us at the South* (however undesirable it may be in some respects) *is not, in itself, sinful. The Bible plainly recognizes it; and the SIN OF SLAVERY* (for there is much sin attending it) *springs, not from the nature of the relation, but FROM THE NEGLECT OF DUTY IN THE MASTER.* The command of God is, "*Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven!*"

Some have ventured to assert, that the text and other similar directions and like allusions found in various parts of the New Testament and the Old, do not necessarily imply slavery, properly speaking; because those designated as *servants* may have been hired labourers; and those called *masters*, merely the employers; just as it is now in British families, and in those of our Eastern and Northern States. But no competent judge, no one with the least pretensions to scholarship, will, for one moment, hesitate to admit, that slavery in its most despotic form existed among the ancient Greeks, the Romans, and even among the Jews. Nor can it be denied that the word *servant* does, in the New Testament, denote a *slave*, a person held as property by another; and that the word *master* denotes *one who holds certain of his fellow-men in bondage*, just as those terms are now used among us. Now the text, thus distinctly recognizing the existence of slavery, does as plainly imply the compatibility of holding slaves, and yet being a Christian; for

it is addressed to members of a Christian church at Colosse, and it addresses them as masters of slaves, and tells them their duties *as* masters. Here then we have, from the pen of an inspired Apostle, and written some years after the ascension of Christ, and after the day of Pentecost and the full establishment of the Gospel-church, an address directed to a church regularly organized under Apostolic authority;—and the very terms in which this address is couched show, that in that church, founded, governed, and instructed by Apostles themselves, were both masters and slaves. The relation is spoken of as existing, as well known and understood. Not one word of condemnation is here found, not a hint of its being wrong to be a master, or of its being an intolerable oppression to be a servant; but it is emphatically said, “*Masters ought to treat their servants so and so.*” The inference is plain: slaveholding is not in itself sinful; since, if a master treat his slaves as herein required, he discharges his whole duty *as* a master; he may continue a master, continue to hold slaves so treated, and yet be a good man, and a worthy member of the church of Christ: which could not be, were slaveholding sinful in the sight of God.

Tell us not that the Apostles connived at slavery, because it was rooted in the usages of society and protected by law; because the community was not yet sufficiently enlightened to receive the whole truth on that subject, and because it would have perilled the very existence of the infant church to declare the real wickedness involved in slavery; and that, therefore, on the ground of *expediency* the Apostles wrote as they did, *apparently sanctioning*, what they *really* condemned! What! Are we to believe that the Apostles, the founders of the Christian church, the very men who counted not their lives dear “for the sake of truth and righteousness,” suffered themselves to be deterred from a plain duty by fear of consequences? Are we to believe that they, who endured every hardship, braved every danger, and finally shed their blood to advance the cause of truth and goodness in the world, would, from dread of the consequences of denouncing it, tolerate in the infant churches they formed as models for the church in all ages, a sin so replete with evil, so enormous and so damning, as hot abolitionists now represent slaveholding to be? No man in his senses can believe this! *The Apostles certainly addressed slaveholders in such terms as show that they regarded their position as masters, and their duty as Christians, as not at all inconsistent.* If honest men, the Apostles would not thus directly sanction what they believed to be wrong. If, in writing their epistles to the churches, the Apostles were inspired of God, then it is plain, that not only did they honestly deem that the master of

slaves might be a true Christian, but their decision is a sound one; and they who now assert that slaveholding is in itself wrong, are assuming to be wiser than inspired Apostles, and more benevolent than God himself. If God did not, by revelation through the Apostles, teach us that slavery is wrong, and therefore to be abolished, (as he clearly did not,) then has God no where taught this: for the Apostles were the last men ever found on earth, on whom the spirit of inspiration rested. The zealous friends of immediate and universal abolition, on the ground that *slavery is sinful*, must first bring proof, clear and indisputable, that they are inspired of God himself to teach this new doctrine, ere we can consent, at their bidding, to discard the teachings of the Apostles of Jesus Christ, and repudiate as utterly sinful, an institution which the Apostles unequivocally recognized as existing in the churches they themselves founded, and as not inconsistent with true piety and the hope of a home in heaven. So plainly does the Bible contemplate the existence of domestic servitude—even in the church—and by its laws provide for its due regulation, and for the correction of abuses likely to spring from it, that a zealous abolitionist lately addressed me thus:—*“ Prove to me from the Bible that slavery is to be tolerated, and I will trample your Bible under my feet, as I would the vilest reptile on the face of the earth.”* Such language flows, not from humanity, but from a ferocious pride; not from reason, but from madness; not from piety, but from the very spirit of infidelity.

The plain matter of fact is, that there ever has been, and there must be, great inequality in the condition of men. The rich and the poor, the powerful and the feeble, the daring and the timid, are every where found among men. In all communities there are superiors and inferiors, the successful and the unsuccessful, the leaders and the led. Could you, to-morrow, reduce all men to one uniform and perfect level, in condition, in property, and in privileges, not a week would pass away without producing changes utterly destructive of perfect equality. The prudence of some and the follies of others would have already wrought changes ominous of a speedy return to the ordinary condition of society, with all its diversity of ranks and conditions. The bold would overawe, the cunning would outwit their neighbours, the sagacious and energetic would accumulate property, and with it power. Masters and servants would, in some form, speedily be found in society as before.

In very early times, when society began to increase in numbers, the turbulent passions of men plunged them into conflicts one with another, and the successful parties compelled the vanquished to submit to their control. When wars at length arose, those who fell into the power of

the victors were put to death. Afterwards, the conqueror sometimes spared the lives of those falling into his power, but only to reserve them for his own service, or to secure the price they might bring when sold to others. Hence the origin of slavery. Captives taken in war were, doubtless, the first slaves; and the lot of servitude was entailed by inheritance on all their descendants. Hence we find traces of the existence of slavery, even from the earliest times. Nimrod, the mighty hunter, is often asserted to have been the first slaveholder, Gen. 10 : 9.

Certain it is that long before the time of Moses, slavery existed. Abraham had slaves, and many of them. There were of this class, born in his house, no less than 300 capable of bearing arms, Gen. 14 : 14. Hagar, the maid of Sarah, whom her mistress surrendered to Abraham in hope of an heir, was an Egyptian slave, Gen. 16 : 3; and Ishmael, her son, was by birth a slave also. in contradistinction from Isaac, who was born free, being the son of a free mother. This admitted fact, "*Hagar gendereth to bondage—she is in bondage with her children,*" is the basis of the Apostle's comparison, between the law and the gospel, Gal. 14 : 24-26.

The patriarch Joseph was sold by his treacherous brethren, a *slave* to the Ishmaelite merchants, and by them he was conveyed into Egypt, and there resold to Potiphar. A few years later, under the administration of Joseph, as prime-minister to Pharaoh, the whole Egyptian nation having alienated their lands to the crown, to procure the means of sustenance, next sold their personal freedom, and became a race of hereditary serfs, appertaining to the soil, and passing with it from owner to owner. Later still, the whole race of Israel, from the condition of protected guests, were degraded to that of slaves to Egypt's monarchs; they were compelled to work, not for their own advantage, but at the bidding, and for the profit of their taskmasters. Samson, when captured by the Philistines, was reduced to the rank of a slave; compelled to labour hard, or to make rude sport, at the pleasure of his masters. The little Hebrew maid, who, in the time of the prophet Elisha (2 Kings, 5 : 2) waited upon her mistress, the wife of Naaman, the Syrian leper, was a slave, a captive taken in war.

Unquestionably were most of the ancient heathen nations around the Jews holders of slaves. Such were the Midianites, the Egyptians, and the Canaanitish tribes. We read that Pharaoh bestowed sundry gifts upon Abraham, among which were slaves. "*He entreated Abraham well, for Sarah's sake; and he had sheep, and oxen, and he-asses, and men-servants and maid-servants.*" Gen. 12 : 16. Abimelech also "*took sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants, and gave*

them to Abraham." Gen. 20 : 14. It is certain, then, that Abraham, the great progenitor of the Hebrew nation, and the friend of God, was a large slaveholder. He seems to have held slaves by inheritance, for he had several hundreds born in his family ; he received some, as gifts, from powerful friends, and others he had, bought with his money. Gen. 17 : 23 ; (see also vs. 12. 13.) And yet,—"*father of the faithful*" though he is styled in God's word,—were Abraham now living among us, with all his slaves around him, sealed though they were in God's own covenant by divine command, he would, by modern abolitionists, be excluded from the church, as a cruel, selfish, hard-hearted man, a bloody-handed man-stealer.

Moreover, not only was slavery tolerated of heaven in the household of Abraham, but by the laws given to the Jews by Moses, it was expressly allowed, and placed under certain definite restrictions. From Levit. 25 : 39–46 we learn, that between the native Hebrew and the gentile, a marked distinction was established, in relation to this subject. A Hebrew might, through stress of poverty, sell his personal liberty ; but he could not be made a slave. He might bind himself to render service for many years, but he served as one hired, not as a slave ; and on the return of the year of jubilee, he had his freedom restored to him in full. But in regard to the heathen, the case was different. The Jew was allowed by the laws of Moses to purchase men of heathen or gentile origin, as slaves ; to hold them as a possession, as property ; and a servant of this class was called his master's *money*, i. e. his property, insomuch that though, if when chastising a servant, that servant should die under his hand, the master subjected himself to a certain penalty ; yet, if the servant so beaten should linger for a day or two, and then die, the master who smote him should not be punished ; for, (says the Hebrew legislator,) *that servant is his master's money*. Exod. 21 : 21. Whatever modern abolitionists may say respecting it, the Mosaic law, (which all *Christians* believe to have been given by inspiration from God himself,) allowed the most pious Jew that ever lived, to purchase slaves, and to hold them, and treat them as property. That is, the God of heaven did in times of old allow men to make merchandise of their fellow men, of beings made in the image of God. These gentile slaves, thus bought and held as property by the Jews, might be given to other Jews as presents, or sold, or bequeathed to their heirs as a possession. For the bondage of these gentile slaves was perpetual ;—" *They shall be bondmen for ever,*" Levit. 25 : 46 ; i. e. they and their descendants were a race of hereditary servants, as ours are now.

To the servant of Jewish birth the year of jubilee brought full restoration to freedom ; to the servant of gentile origin the jubilee itself brought no discharge. The Hebrew servant was, like our hired labourers, or rather like a modern apprentice, or like a German redemptioner, held to service only for a limited period ; the heathen slaves among the Jews, were, like our negro slaves, held in bondage for life, with a reversion of like servitude to all their descendants, for ever.

Nor were the ministers of religion debarred from the right of holding men in servitude. Thus we read, Levit. 22 : 10. 11, "*A sojourner with a priest, OR HIS HIRED SERVANT, shall not eat of the holy thing, (i. e. the flesh offered in sacrifice,) but if the priest BUY ANY SOUL WITH HIS MONEY, he shall eat of it ; AND HE THAT IS BORN IN HIS HOUSE, they shall eat of it.*" Here, then, the distinction between hired servants and slaves, purchased or inherited, is clearly laid down ; and slaves no less than hired servants, are supposed to be included in the family-establishment of the very ministers of God, the priests officiating at the altars of religion. It seems, then, that Moses, the great lawgiver of the Jews, who talked face to face with God, did not think that holding slaves polluted a man's hands with blood, or disqualified him for serving acceptably in the awful solemnities of religion.

As surely, then, as Moses wrote by divine inspiration, did God himself sanction among the Jews, the tolerance of slavery, including the buying and selling of human beings, with their descendants, into perpetual bondage. What God sanctions cannot be in itself, and essentially, evil. Moreover, the laws which God enacted for the treatment of slaves, and the privileges he authorized to be extended to the slaves of his covenant-people show, that God looks upon the condition of a slave, (wholly dependent though he be on the pleasure of his master, for his personal comforts,) as not inconsistent with the service of God, and with the hope of salvation.

But in reply to this argument drawn from the Mosaic law, it is often urged—" *The tolerance of slavery in the Jewish church, furnishes no argument to prove that slavery is lawful now ; because polygamy was tolerated in that ancient church, and yet no one contends for polygamy now ! If we may hold slaves now because Abraham held slaves, and any Jew, however pious, might hold them, then we must authorize polygamy now, too, because Abraham, and Jacob, and David, all good men and approved of God, had each of them many wives !*"

But to this I answer, the cases are not parallel. Whatever God has once sanctioned cannot be, in itself, and essentially, wrong. God did once sanction the existence of slaveholding and of polygamy both ; and

unless God have withdrawn that sanction, and condemned one or the other of these practices, both must be still lawful to this hour. In the case of polygamy, God has withdrawn that sanction, and declared it to be adultery for a man to have more than one wife at the same time. In the case of slaveholding, God has not withdrawn his sanction under the gospel. On the contrary, he has *renewed that sanction*, by prescribing, through his inspired Apostles, the rules by which masters and servants, even when members of the church of Christ, are to regulate their intercourse one with another.

If, instead of declaring, as he has done, that "*whosoever putteth away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, and marrieth another, committeth adultery*," (and this surely condemns polygamy, for it is not the putting *away* of a wife that constitutes adultery, but the taking of a second wife while the first is living. Unless, indeed, we would maintain that a man may take a second and a third wife in addition to the first, and be no adulterer, so long as he keeps them all; but the moment he repudiates the first, his taking of a second renders him an adulterer, which were certainly absurd;) if, instead of this, God had given directions in the New Testament, how a Christian husband should treat his household of three or four or more wives, and how those three or four wives of one and the same Christian husband should treat that husband, just as the Apostles have laid down directions to show how Christian masters should treat their slaves, and how Christian slaves should conduct themselves toward their masters, then we should unhesitatingly admit, that now, just as in the days of Abraham and of Solomon, a man may have several wives and yet be a good Christian, and just as now he may have many slaves, and yet be a truly pious man. As it is, polygamy and slavery were, in the Jewish church, both allowed; but under the gospel polygamy is condemned; slaveholding is still recognized as lawful; and appropriate rules are laid down for the guidance of Christian masters and of Christian servants. "*Masters give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.*"

But it is objected again, "The servants spoken of in the New Testament, could not have been like our negro slaves, held in involuntary bondage; they must have been either hired servants, or else persons bound by voluntary contract, to servitude for a limited period, like our apprentices; or, possibly, in some cases, bound to serve for the period of their natural lives. *It could not* have been a *hereditary* bondage, like modern slavery; because all claim to hold such slaves, is founded on oppression and injustice. The original title to property

in the slaves of this class must have been defective; and no lapse of time, no repetitions of transfer from one to another, can ever make that title good. The original title must have been fraudulently obtained, and however often transferred, it is, and it must ever be, still invalidated by the fraud involved in its origin. It is an admitted axiom, that *'the receiver of stolen goods, is as bad as the thief.'* He who first made his fellow man a slave, was a man-stealer; he was guilty of oppression and robbery; the first purchaser of such slave, became in the very act of purchase, a participator in the guilt of his reduction to slavery; and with every transfer of title, was transferred also the guilt of that original theft. A man who holds his fellow man in involuntary bondage is, therefore, and must ever be, an oppressor, and a man-stealer. Now the Apostles declare, that *'men-stealers shall not inherit the kingdom of God;'* consequently the masters to whom the Apostles wrote, were not men-stealers; they were not slaveholders in the modern sense of the word."

The answer to this objection is obvious. If the reasoning here employed be correct, that all involuntary bondage is the fruit of oppression, and that every slaveholder is a man-stealer, then it must be conceded that, under the Old Testament dispensation, God did sanction oppression and man-stealing; for he did expressly permit the purchase, the holding, and the sale of men held to involuntary and perpetual bondage; and bondage entailed on their descendants. And yet, both in the Old and the New Testament, God does condemn man-stealing as a crime fatal to all profession of piety. Unless then we choose to charge God with injustice and inconsistency both, we must admit that slaveholding does not necessarily involve guilt of any kind; that a man may lawfully hold his fellow man in involuntary bondage, without being thereby stained with guilt of robbery, oppression, or injustice, and the title to property in slaves may be held and conveyed to others, without the attendance or conveyance of the guilt of any crime. If this might be true in Abraham's day, and in the days of the Jewish Judges and the Jewish Kings, it may be true also in our own day. Certain it is, that in the times of the Apostles of Jesus Christ, this must have been true. The masters addressed by the Apostles in the New Testament, are by them supposed to be capable of discharging their duty as masters and of being good Christians nevertheless. A man-stealer (as these same Apostles teach, see 1 Tim. 1: 10; comp. also Exod. 21: 16, and Deut. 24: 7) cannot be a good Christian; therefore, if inspired Apostles judged correctly, these masters were certainly not men-stealers. But these masters were most unquestionably *slaveholders*, in the fullest

sense of the word as now used. This all the records of antiquity show. Of the servants of these masters, some they held by inheritance, some they had bought with money, just as slaves are now bought or inherited. Masters in the days of the Apostles had also a much more absolute power over their servants than we now have over our slaves. They held them as their property, they could sell them, or bequeath them by will, or they could by deed of gift, convey to others their title in their servants; and they could punish them for their faults, all just as we can; nay, they could do what we have no power to do, for under certain circumstances masters could punish their servants with death. This is the kind of slavery existing, under the Roman governments, in the countries where Christian churches were established by the Apostles; nay, existing in those very churches, with the knowledge and the sanction of the Apostles. Thus to hold slaves was, therefore, not equivalent to man-stealing, in the days of the Apostles; if not then, neither is it now. To be a slaveholder, as slavery exists in these Southern States, is not, therefore, at all inconsistent with Christian character, if only the *duties* of a master be rightly performed on Christian principles.

A *parent* has almost unlimited power over his children. He has *power* to bring them up well or ill, to train them up virtuously or viciously, to make them happy or miserable. The mere *possession* of this power does not make him a tyrant, or a bad man. If the parental power be exercised on Christian principles, the strictest father may be a true Christian. The *power* to do a thing, and the *right* to do it, are two quite different things, and do not always go together.

The *possession* of power certainly implies the possibility of its abuse; and the *abuse* of power it is, that gives rise to the evils attendant on slavery. Hence the propriety of rules furnished in the word of God, for directing the conduct of parents and of masters in the exercise of their power in a right manner.

Slavery implies the possession by the master of a power over the servant, which may be abused to his detriment; and therefore the rule, "*Masters give unto your servants that which is just and equal,*" &c.

The command to do justice implies the possession of *power*, but not of *right*, to treat unjustly and to withhold that which is equal.

Another objection is often urged against the whole institution of slavery, and urged even by good and discreet men, to this effect:—"*Slavery, though it may not be expressly forbidden in the Bible, nay, though it may seem to receive indirect sanction from the rules there laid down, is so manifestly contrary to the great law of love, that it cannot be right to uphold it. Just so far as true religion, which teaches us*

'to do unto others as we would they should do unto us,' shall prevail among men, must the abuses of this institution become manifest, and lead to its extirpation. It follows, therefore, that no good man can be a friend to slavery; and the church is bound to attempt the removal of it at once, just as certainly as benevolence is a Christian duty.'

This objection presents a singular commixture of truth and error. In a certain modified sense the objection may be deemed valid. The direct tendency of religion is to eradicate vice and to correct all abuses; and so far as true religion prevails will men discern the *abuses* attendant on slavery—and abhor them, and attempt their removal. But the *abuse* of a thing is no part of the thing itself. The more extensively true religion prevails in Southern society, the more will masters use their power for the good of their slaves; and inasmuch as power (in the hands of beings so imperfect as men are) is always liable to abuse, true benevolence would lead masters to employ every safe and practicable means for improving the condition and elevating the character of servants, with a view to their complete emancipation, whenever that can be effected without detriment to them, and with safety to the community.

Were the question now to be agitated, Shall we suffer the introduction of slavery among us? and more emphatically still, Shall we take measures to furnish ourselves with domestic servants, by reducing to slavery some of our fellow-men, now free as ourselves? the great law of love, and sound policy no less, would return a prompt refusal.

But with the question of originating slavery, or of now first introducing it here, we have, at present, nothing to do. The institution already exists among us, and, however it may have been originated, the only question for us to ponder is, How, under these circumstances, shall we act? Does the great law of love forbid slavery, and require its immediate extinction? Does that law require that we, because we ourselves, now free, would not like to be reduced to slavery, should instantly set all our slaves free? This the objector affirms;—this I do emphatically deny.

If the law of love *now* demands this, it must always have demanded it, even in the days of Abraham and of Moses. Yet those holy men did not think so, as their practice and their laws show; and those laws God himself sanctioned. Thus to interpret the law of love, is to overstrain its meaning. That law requires us, not to abolish the existing ranks and distinctions of condition in society, but to treat each person in a manner suited to our relative positions; a manner such as, were our positions reversed, we might personally desire he would employ in

treating us. That law requires the master, not to set his slaves free, (which would, in many instances, be the greatest unkindness he could show them,) but to treat them humanely and considerately; to treat them as he, if himself a slave, could reasonably desire to be treated while he was such. If I see a poor man suffering from want, the law of love requires me, not to strip myself of just one half my substance, and confer it upon him, but to extend to him assistance suited to his wants as a poor man, and to my ability in view of my position in society and the other claims upon me.

That is a spurious benevolence which would aim to remove inequalities of condition in society. It is assuredly very different from the benevolence of God, which, pure and perfect though it is, tolerates great inequality of condition in society, and great suffering too, which, in our short-sighted wisdom, seems very undesirable; and tolerates it although He is all powerful to remove it at a stroke, if to Him it seemed good so to do.

The existence of slavery in society under certain circumstances, like that of poverty and pain and all the diversities of condition now found among men, may, in the view of Infinite Wisdom, be indispensable to the attainment of the greatest possible good. It may furnish an invaluable trial of character. Forbearance, self-control, justice and benevolence in owners; and patience, humility, fidelity, and deference to God's will, in servants, may be the fruits of this institution, where its appropriate duties are rightly discharged, which, in their effects on the character and the destiny of both masters and slaves hereafter, shall infinitely outweigh all the numerous evils now springing from its existence. Thousands, both of masters and servants, may be constantly growing in excellence of character that shall fit them for higher seats and brighter glories in heaven, than were possible without this institution; so that, many though its incident evils are, all shall hereafter see it was the highest benevolence in God to suffer it to exist: for "the wrath of man shall praise Him!"

However this may be, certain it is that *the sudden introduction of any great change in society must be hazardous, and may be widely destructive.* Common prudence and benevolence both require that before we attempt to effect such change, the probabilities should be very strong that the change is practicable, and will be beneficial, not detrimental. It is not enough that a patient be labouring under a disease which, if unremoved, must kill him, to induce a skilful physician to resort to bold and desperate remedies. He must see a strong probability that the remedy will be safe and effectual; else, it were better to leave

the malady to run its course, and direct his efforts simply to alleviate pain, and mitigate the several symptoms as they occur, in hope of some change that may warrant a more direct interference. Hitherto no scheme for abolishing slavery has been suggested, that is not replete with difficulties, threatening evils to both master and slave, far greater than the institution itself occasions. Until, therefore, some plan shall be unfolded which promises a safe as well as successful issue, benevolence, no less than prudence, demands that no movement be made. Every consideration seems to admonish us—"Be quiet: let this perplexing matter rest untouched, and discharge each one his duty to his servants, leaving the issue in the hands of God." The perplexities attending the management of British West India possessions at this hour, furnish an impressive warning on this subject.* Emancipation has there proved a signal failure, so far as the prosperity of the colonies, or the improvement (moral or intellectual either) of the negroes is concerned. The emancipated slaves in those islands are indolent, ignorant, and luxurious; and the fertile lands they encumber are fast returning to a wilderness, their products continually decreasing, as the official returns show.

Sound policy and Christian benevolence do, then, both warn us to beware. So far from demanding the immediate emancipation of slaves, regardless of consequences, which, in the present condition of Southern society, could not but be eminently disastrous to all parties, the law of Christian love still points to the necessity for leaving this institution undisturbed for the present: and it shows the reasonableness of requiring humanity and justice in masters, fidelity and submission in slaves; precisely as the inspired Apostle taught, "*Masters, render unto your servants that which is just and equal.*" And again: "*Let as many servants as are under the yoke (this certainly describes slaves) count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God be not blasphemed, &c. These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise, he is proud, knowing nothing, &c. FROM SUCH WITHDRAW THYSELF.*" 1 Tim. 6: 1-5.

If the Bible is to be our guide on this subject,† then, instead of

* See an interesting and very able article bearing on this subject, and entitled "Annexation of Texas," in the Southern Quarterly Review for October, 1844. It is said to be from the pen of a young but distinguished member of the Mobile bar.

† So far from bowing to the teachings of revelation, the ultra abolitionists of our day evince a spirit of undisguised infidelity. They are bitter and malignant. Assuming, without proof or reason, that slavery is evil, and contrary to the dictates of reason and the law of love, they proceed to carry out this assumed principle, utterly reckless

abolitionists excommunicating slaveholders, (as they openly do,) every abolitionist, every one who denies the authority of masters and their right to demand obedience and honour from their servants; every one who teaches that the slave is not bound to obey and honour his master, and who insists on the immediate abolition of slavery, is *proud, knowing nothing*; he does not consent to wholesome doctrine, even to the words of our Lord Jesus, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness,—and he ought to be CUT OFF FROM THE COMMUNION OF THE CHURCH; for, says the Apostle, *from such withdraw thyself*. So utterly untrue is it that slavery is inconsistent with the law of love.

These popular and oft-repeated objections being thus disposed of, we may safely maintain that a man may lawfully hold in bondage man like himself, to serve him. This institution is undeniably recognized in the Bible: it confers on the master certain rights, and it imposes on him also, certain peculiar obligations.

The master has a right of property in his servant, so that he may use him, lend him, bequeath him, or even sell him to another.* But *this right*

of consequences. When pressed by arguments drawn from the Bible, they attempt to evade them, by shamelessly perverting Scripture, and making it bend to their views by a forced interpretation. When they find that still the authority of the Bible is, and ever must be, against them, they scruple not to deny its authority, and blaspheme its Author. An abolitionist, in a letter addressed to me while at the East last autumn, thus expresses himself: "*Prove to me that the Almighty God sanctions slavery, and you prove that He out-herods Herod, He out-juggernauts Juggernaut, He out-satanizes Satan!*" Can such language be the dictate of piety and love?

The disorganizing tendency of the fundamental principle on which abolitionism rests is sufficiently apparent in the excesses into which many of the ultra abolitionists have rushed. They deny revelation, they desecrate the Sabbath, they repudiate the church and the Christian ministry; nay, they would for ever blast the chief charm of woman, her retiring modesty, by teaching her to leave her proper sphere, refuse obedience, and demand equality with man, openly standing forth in large public assemblies, to speak, and argue as does man. Their fundamental position, that "*all persons are on an entire equality; that no one person can rightfully exercise authority over another, except so far as that other may be pleased to allow it,*" is obviously irrational and dangerous. Fully carried out, it would destroy all distinctions in society, break up every family, and spread disorder, wretchedness, and guilt all around. It cannot, then, be true.

* It is surprising to observe how strong, how enduring, how far-reaching, are the prejudices of even good and intelligent men, respecting this subject. Some years since, when accosted by a well-known abolitionist, with reproaches as being guilty of countenancing slavery, and contributing to perpetuate the *sin*, by my residence at the South, I replied, that till he should convince me *that slavery is a sin*, all his admonitions were lost upon me; and I added, "*So far as SIN is involved in the transaction, I could, with as safe a conscience, purchase a good servant offered me, if I needed one, as I could purchase a horse. or any thing else.*" At this he expressed surprise and

of property is modified and restricted by the nature of the possession: a man's right in his land is one thing; in his horse another, in his servant another. A man is not allowed to use his horse as he would a log of wood, though both be his own property: he cannot lawfully hack, and cut, and burn a horse as he might a log. The horse is his property to use for his own benefit, in any way consistent with its well-being as an animal capable of suffering and of enjoyment. So also a master has the right of property in his servants, to use them for his own benefit, in any way consistent with their nature as human beings, not only sentient, like mere animals, but also as rational, as accountable beings, HAVING IMMORTAL SOULS. A man may not lawfully use his servants as if they were mere animals, without souls, and irresponsible to God. He may have the power to do so, but he has not the right; and no law can ever

abhorrence. Some months later, in answer to the inquiries of a friend in New-York respecting my language in that conversation, I repeated this expression in my letter. That letter was shown to another noted abolitionist, and by him an extract containing the obnoxious passage was taken and published in several abolition papers at the North and East. This extract has been republished in various papers again and again, accompanied by sundry comments far from complimentary to my good sense, and my character for humanity and for piety. It is called a horrible sentiment, language outrageous, indicative of a mind blinded, a heart hardened and a conscience already seared. Of one distinguished minister at the North it is said, he declared he would never again ask me to occupy his pulpit, since I had uttered sentiments so atrocious: of another it is affirmed that, when told I had so expressed myself, he said he regretted I had preached in his pulpit, but that he would never ask me again. Only last week, I received by mail a paper printed at Hartford, Conn., containing a republication of the obnoxious declaration, together with a pointed intimation that I am morally blinded and hardened, not fit to enjoy fellowship with any church. Now, why all this outcry? What is there so outrageous in the expression I used? The point of comparison was, not the nature or the qualities of a slave and a horse, not the uses to which they might be put; but simply and only *the morality of the act of purchasing* the one or the other. The most that can be charged upon me is, perhaps, a disregard of good taste in the selection of the *object of comparison*. It might have been less offensive to a fastidious delicacy, had I, in that hurried conversation, spoken of buying a house or a Bible, instead of a horse; but that is all. There either *is sin* in slavery, or there is not. Where slavery exists, the right to property in a slave may be sold. The purchase of that right is either sinful, or it is not: if not, then there is no more *sin* in the mere act of purchasing a servant, than there is in any other purchase, no matter what. The point of comparison is, *the morality of the act of purchasing*; not the use to which what is purchased is to be put. And yet, because, to convey clearly the idea of my conviction that to such purchase no sin appertains, I happened to select an object for comparison not perhaps in the most refined taste, I am denounced and extensively published as a hard-hearted, unfeeling monster; just as though I had said that a fellow-man, even if a true Christian, when held in bondage, is no better than a horse, and may lawfully be treated like a beast!

invest him with that right. So to treat servants is to oppress them cruelly.

A master is entitled, 1, *To all the service which the time, the strength, or the skill of his servant, may qualify him to render.*

This is implied in the very nature of the servile relation. The servant is the property of his master, so far as that his labour, or his skill in any useful art, must be honestly given for the benefit of his master, as if it were for himself "*doing service with good will: not with eye-service, as man-pleasers, but as rendering service unto God.*"

A master is entitled to claim from his servants, 2, *Fidelity to his interests.* The servant belongs to his master, and is identified with his master's interests. If the master prosper, the servant is benefited: if the master suffer loss, the servant's interests will be affected by that loss. A right view of his relations would teach a servant, that he cannot sunder his interests from those of his master; and that he is bound by the command of God himself, to serve his master with all fidelity, and to labour for the advancement of his master's interests, as he would for his own.

The master is entitled, 3, *To respect and attachment from his servants.* This is emphatically enjoined in God's holy word. Ephes. 6: 5, 7: "*Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ. WITH GOOD WILL doing service, as to the Lord, and not unto men!*" Words could not more fully express the duty of respectful obedience, and cordial attachment, from servants to masters. And to this affectionate obedience an upright and intelligent master is fully entitled. He is the best and nearest friend to his servants: he stands to them, in many important respects, in the place of a father: and they owe to him fidelity, honesty, cheerful obedience, and firm attachment, *not purloining, not answering again!*" An ungrateful, idle, or sullen servant is not a Christian. A rebellious, plotting, mischief-making servant is not, and cannot be a Christian, however loud his professions of piety.

But it is equally true that the master owes certain returns to his servants.

1, *He is to yield them an adequate and a comfortable support.* The servant devotes his whole time and labour to the master: in return, that master is bound to give him a competent support, i. e. to feed, to clothe and to lodge the servant and his whole family. It is just and equal that a full support be given to the servant, and a *comfortable* support, suited in all respects to his wants as a human being devoted to labour. This support includes suitable care and attendance in sickness, and all needed

provision when by age or infirmity disabled from work. An unfeeling, cruel master, who over-works his servants, or who allows them not a sufficiency of food, shelter, and clothing, is withholding from them that which is just and equal, and he cannot be a Christian.

But the master owes to his servants, 2, *Kind and considerate treatment*. Kindness is due from us to all men, but especially should it temper the authority we exercise over those subjected to our control: so says the inspired Apostle. "*Ye masters! do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening; knowing that your Master, also, is in heaven. Neither is there respect of persons with him.*" Eph. 6: 9. A rash, boisterous, passionate, or vindictive master is a great affliction to faithful servants. A master has, it is true, the *power* to treat his servants harshly, but he has not the *right*: and if he does so treat them, he is not a Christian; he is flying in the very teeth of God's law, and trampling its precepts under foot. But a master owes to his servants,

3, *Due instruction and care for their morals, even if this life only be contemplated.*

Our servants are human beings, our fellow men: of different complexion from us, it is true; but they are men, like ourselves, subject to God's law, conscious of the difference between right and wrong, and responsible for their actions. Neither the negro nor the white man can be truly happy, nor useful to the entire extent of his capacity, without due moral training. Our servants are entitled to receive at our hands faithful, regular, and minute instruction, and that from their earliest childhood, up to maturity, even to old age, and in all that pertains to good conduct and pure morals. On this point I am painfully convinced there is a great defect in the practice of the church.

Wicked men, who are reckless in their own conduct, may be expected to neglect the moral instruction of their slaves, for they neglect the instruction of their own children. But a Christian master is bound to regard his slaves as moral agents, whose well being depends on their own conduct, and whose conduct will flow from the principles he instils into them, or allows them to imbibe. Servants, just as regularly and as faithfully as our children, ought to be instructed in all moral duties, such as honesty, truth, industry, temperance, chastity, and self government in all respects. When guilty of a sin, they should be admonished; and, if need be, corrected, with kindness, but with inflexible firmness. Nothing would tend more to improve the moral character, and the entire condition of servants; nothing would contribute more fully, in the long run, to increase their value as servants, (because it would cherish all the virtues which make their service to be depended on,) than would the

recognizing, by law, of the marriage of negroes ; and surrounding the domestic relations of our servants with a bulwark as sacred, as that which protects our own families. So long as the marriage tie among negroes continues, as now, a mere legal nullity, the husband and wife, the parents and children, may, at any moment, be sundered hopelessly and for ever,* at the caprice of the master, or at the demand of his creditors, or at the pleasure of the administrators of his estate. *This is wrong, it is an outrage to humanity, it is an insult to God!*—I am not guilty of sedition in thus expressing myself. I am but exercising a right appertaining to each and every citizen, that of discussing the merits of public measures and public enactments. If I deem a law unjust, unconstitutional, or impolitic, I have a right to say so, at any time and on any occasion, and to state also my reasons for desiring an alteration of the law. Our laws are defective in omitting to sanction the marriage of slaves, so that the marriage tie among them may be deemed equally sacred with that among freemen. The omission is of injurious tendency ; and I am persuaded that a large proportion of our respectable slaveholders so regard it, and they would gladly sanction the amendment of the law, if any one would but have the firmness to step forward and propose it in due place and form. The man who shall do this—and carry it through successfully—will entitle himself to the veneration and gratitude of generations yet unborn. Such an alteration in our laws would speedily correct the loose notions now prevailing among negroes on this subject. It would bind the negroes together in strong family ties, it would endear them to each other, and attach them to their masters. It would supply powerful motives to chastity and self-respect among servants, and it would awaken in the bosom of parents among them, a desire to train their children up under suitable moral restraints, that they may become good and orderly and respectable. An honest, faithful, and virtuous servant is as truly entitled to respect, as the wealthy and perhaps accomplished master ; for, in his humble sphere, he bows to the will of God, and does his duty. And what can the best among us all do more ? “ *With God there is no respect of persons.*” Master and servant are alike responsible to him.

Careful instruction in every moral duty, and the employment of all suitable influences to induce him to *be* moral, the master owes to his

* It is true this can be done ; and in cases of the administration of an estate, and of the emigration of families to distant places, it is often done. But it is also true that the feeling in the community is strong against it, and great care is usually taken to avoid this separation of families. But the law ought to interpose an effectual prohibition.

servants. One of the surest means to promote this great object would be found, I am persuaded, in the legalization of marriage among them. The mercenary creditor, the hardened trafficker in human sinews, and the devotee of a loathsome licentiousness, might clamour in opposition, but not, I should suppose, the intelligent, the upright, the generous-spirited master, who has the best interests of his servants at heart.

4. *The master owes to his slaves all practicable facilities for securing their eternal salvation.*

The master's *rights* are bounded by the grave, but his *responsibilities* overleap that barrier, and stretch onward through eternity. The slave has a soul like yours or mine: and for his salvation, as truly as for yours or mine, the Redeemer died. A master has no right to peril his slaves' prospects for the life to come. The slave has a right to be so treated that he may learn to live honestly, virtuously, and respectably here, and may enjoy every possible advantage for securing eternal life in heaven hereafter. Religious instruction from the Bible, and that from early childhood, every servant is entitled to receive from his master, together with the *rest* furnished by a weekly Sabbath, and all suitable facilities for attending the public worship of God. If the master is entitled to the labour of his servant during six days, God claims the seventh day for observance as a Sabbath: a day of sacred rest to your man-servant, and your maid-servant, as well as to yourself and your cattle. Every master is bound by the very nature of the relation he sustains to his servants, to see to it that they receive suitable religious instruction, that they rest on the Sabbath, and that they be encouraged, nay required, to attend seriously on the public worship of God. Were this required of every servant, (as it ought to be,) and were the duty always enforced by the master's own example in the family, and in the house of God each Sabbath; what a different appearance would Southern society present! Masters would be honoured and loved by their servants, as their true friends; and servants would, as a body, be contented, industrious, orderly, virtuous, and happy. The servant would regard himself as a constituent part of his master's family, and he would be so regarded and so treated by his master. Abraham so treated his servants; he brought them into covenant with God. *The servants born in his house, and those bought with his money, he circumcised*, Gen. 17: 12, 13, 23; and by so doing he pledged himself to instruct, and to require his servants to keep the law of God. The Mosaic law contemplated this; for the bond-servant of a priest might eat of the sacred offerings, just as one of the priest's own family might do. In every Hebrew family also, their bond-servants, whether inherited or bought

with money, were required to be *circumcised*; and were also allowed to partake of the passover, Exod. 12: 44; comp. Gen. 17: 12, 13. In like manner, (since baptism holds in the gospel church the very place that circumcision did in the Jewish,) Christian masters ought to have all their servants, just as their children, baptized, carefully instructed, and trained for admission to God's church. Thus to treat servants is *giving to them that which is just and equal*, as to immortal beings. This duty is enforced on masters by the consideration, that "*they also have a Master in heaven.*"

Yes, true it is, we may be legally entitled to certain services from those whose masters we are, but we too have a Master in heaven, who claims our service, in the use of every talent we possess in compliance with his will. For all, we must render to Him a strict account, and for the manner in which we have treated our servants, no less than for the manner in which we have personally improved or abused our own religious privileges. Happy and blessed is the man, who like the holy patriarch of old, trains his entire household, servants no less than children, in the fear of God.

But wo to the selfish and unthinking master, who, (however liberal the provision he makes for the present comfort of his slaves,) puts it out of their power to learn how they may become reconciled to God and save their souls. The man who wantonly kills a servant, is a murderer. He who shuts out his servants from a knowledge of salvation through Jesus Christ, is a *murderer of souls*, and he must meet a dread responsibility at the bar of God; whose high command is, *Masters give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.* Amen.





